



Association For Consumer Rights (Malta)

Official address: Volunteer Centre
181, Melita Street
Valletta, VLT 1129, Malta
Email address: associationforconsumerrights@gmail.com
Website: www.acrmalta.com

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Association for Consumer Rights Resolution for AGM 2023

Title of Resolution: A sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices.

Current situation

The European Commission's recent initiative to establish a legal framework for sustainable food systems, including rules on sustainable food labelling is very timely as there is clearly a need for rules and a certain level of standardisation and harmonisation in order to ensure credibility

The aim of the Commission is to explore possible options for a sustainable food labelling framework and to come forward with conclusions and recommendations to support the European Commission in developing such a policy framework from an early stage.

In line with the EU Commission, ACR stresses that sustainability is a multidimensional concept, which should always give equal consideration to the economic, environmental and social dimension;

People's eating habits are very diverse, depend on different factors, and are very persistent. Expectations for a sustainability labelling scheme should therefore be realistic from the outset. However, there is a general interest in changing to more sustainable consumption patterns;

The need for adequate reliable labelling. The crucial role that education plays in providing a basic understanding of sustainability aspects relating to food is very important. Awareness raising campaigns and adequate measures to support the affordability of sustainable food products can also promote the transition towards more sustainable food systems.

Establishing a Sustainable Food Labelling Framework

Following the Commission's initiative, ACR recommends, therefore, establishing a sustainable food labelling framework that is transparent, based on science and as simple and pragmatic as possible, both helping economic operators to assess and improve the sustainability of products and providing useful information to help consumers make informed choices.



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A labelling framework should not aim at classifying food as sustainable or unsustainable, but should instead support the development towards a more sustainable food system. The labelling framework is designed to help economic operators assess and improve the sustainability of products (methodologies that incentivise improvements, for example a benchmarking system or a reference system) and to provide useful guidance to consumers.

This labelling framework should be developed in an open and transparent manner with the involvement of relevant stakeholders and it should build on a clear, science-based methodology. To this end, companies should have access to indicators, methodologies and the results achieved on the basis of the labelling scheme. Above all, it must be simple.

Companies have a great responsibility to drive, on the one hand, consumers towards healthy and less environmentally impactful choices and, on the other hand, the sustainable transformation of food systems through the adoption of sustainable farming, processing and packaging practices.

Sustainability is a multidimensional concept which should always give equal consideration to the economic, environmental and social dimensions. According to the FAO's definition, a sustainable food system is "a food system that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised". In a nutshell: a one-sided focus on the environmental part of sustainability, as is often the case today, or a one-sided focus on the socio-economic pillars of sustainability is by definition not sustainable. The aim should be to cover the entire value chain in all three dimensions of sustainability.

Sustainability claims should be based on the following principles: reliability, transparency, relevance, accessibility and clarity (UN guidelines for providing product sustainability information). The certification system must ensure that the structural background is sufficiently taken into account so as not to penalise small structures, such as farmers, SMEs, farm gate sales, weekly markets, etc.

Sustainability labelling is important in cases where the manufacturer cannot provide the necessary information directly. Where the manufacturer can provide the relevant information directly to the consumer (e.g. at a local farmers market or a farm shop) a labelling scheme is not necessary. This is also important to avoid bureaucratic burden for small producers.

Labelling the origin of agricultural raw materials therefore also makes it possible to draw conclusions about their level of sustainability.



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European food retailers are already gaining their first experience with pilot projects on sustainable food labelling. Preliminary findings include: the perception of labelled products tends to be more positive than for non-labelled products with little influence on the purchasing decision; positive feedback mainly comes from younger target groups.

Grace Attard - ACR General Secretary